

“How Does God Help Us?”

Isaiah 40:27-31

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Few times have I been touched by a newspaper article as much as I was last Sunday's, "Leaning into Pain." It was about Brad Cunard's struggle to continue with life after the tragic death of his wife, Lisa, and their two children, three year old Max and six month old Owen. You recall that Brad's family was killed instantly on July 10, 2003, when a tree fell during a thunderstorm on their vehicle while stopped at a light on North Highland Avenue. Brad was driving but Lisa and the kids were in the back seat where the tree landed. In an instant, Brad was wrenched from his comfortable life as a thirty-seven year old entrepreneur to what he calls himself now, "The man who lost his family to a tree."

Reading this story, I was impressed with Brad's honesty and courage. As you would expect, his pain is immeasurable and at times immobilizing. By no means has he been able to soar with eagles or run without growing weary. What he has done, though, is walk, ever so slowly, without fainting. This is his miracle.

I suppose one reason this article caught my attention was because my Sunday School class has been discussing Dr. John Claypool's latest book, The Hopeful Heart. We have asked and attempted to answer the question, "How Does God Help Us?" Claypool has helped us, especially with his slant on Isaiah 40:27-31.

Claypool suggests that God helps us in three ways. **The first consists of miracles, interventions and rescue.** There are times, according to Claypool, when God chooses to break in from a transcendent dimension and alter the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

In Mark 1:40, a leper approached Jesus and asked for help. Jesus was moved with pity at the sight of this man, touched him and restored his body to wholeness. "The One that had created the world out of nothing chose to recreate a broken portion of it in a matter of seconds," wrote Claypool. This can happen to us, too.

The second way God helps us takes the form of collaboration or partnership. God invites us to join forces with Him in bringing about a solution to our problems. "We are offered the opportunity of combining our skills, insights and energies with those of God to resolve our problems."

When the Jews lived in Egypt during the reign of the pharaohs, their number increased to alarming proportions. A decree was issued that all male Hebrews must be killed at birth. Do you recall what Moses' mother did to spare his life? She made a little bamboo boat and placed Moses in it. As he floated down the Nile, Pharaoh's daughter discovered him. She decided to defy her father's orders and adopt this baby. At this point in the story, Moses' sister offered to go get a woman that could help Pharaoh's daughter nurse this baby. And whom did she get? Moses' mother, of course.

Moses' life was spared and years later God offered to partner with this rescued baby that became a shepherd to secure the release of His people from bondage. Moses' life is filled with examples of God partnering with people to help others.

Claypool writes, "This collaborative form of help is the one that God seems to employ most often. Again and again, the Holy One invites us to use our own creativity and resourcefulness in finding solutions to our problems."

The third form of help is the quietest and most easily overlooked, according to Claypool. It is the gift of endurance. There are times when God says, "There will be no solving of the problem, but I will give you the strength to endure the unchangeable and to experience real growth in the process."

A good example of this is found in II Corinthians 12:7-10. Paul suffered with a chronic problem that interfered with his ability to minister. No doubt he had sought medical help from the finest doctors and had prayed for God to intervene and take away the problem. After all, if God was going to heal someone miraculously, who better than Paul? However, no miracle occurred and no medical solution was found which caused Paul to write about the Lord, "My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness."

As believers, we must trust God to select the best way to help us under our circumstances. We must not give in to despair and depression when God does not do what we ask or want. Instead, we must let God be God, believe that "the One that made all things genuinely cares about everything He has created" and thank Him for the help He will faithfully and graciously offer.

Claypool's keen insight helped me to see that all three forms of assistance are found in Isaiah 40:27-31. This passage was a gift from the prophet to the Israelites during their Babylonian captivity. Fifty years of bondage had taken a toll on the people. Spiritual and physical fatigue had set in. God's people had no trouble voicing dismay, confusion, bitterness, loneliness, dejection and rejection. It was evident to them that the God of creation had forgotten them. "My way is hidden from the Lord. My cause is disregarded by God" Isaiah 40:27. Surely you sense their feelings of abandonment and pity.

The prophet countered with this beautiful confession of faith. He assured them that not only did God know where they were, He understood their plight and needs. From His inexhaustible supply of strength He would renew theirs.

"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall, but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint" Isaiah 40:29-31.

What is most fascinating about this passage is the descending order of mobility mentioned in 40:31. The normal progression of human development is to crawl, walk and run. Isaiah reversed the order and told his readers that there would be times when God would help them "soar on wings like eagles." He would intervene, set them free and lift them above their problems.

Then there would be times when God would help them "run and not grow weary." He would partner with them to move beyond their problems.

Finally, there would be times when God would help them "walk and not faint." He would not provide a way of escape but a means to endure. He would sustain them through the "valley of the shadow of death."

Actually, I think this third form of help may require the greatest miracle. This is where life is lived day after day. I marvel more at the people that survive a crisis than those that are spared one. The real test of faith comes not when a person flies or runs but when he or she plods along without giving up. It is in the routine with all of its struggles that we need inspiration and strength.

On the morning after the accident, Brad Cunard slumped to his knees in the shower and prayed, "God help me because I cannot do it by myself." Since then, he starts every day with a prayer in the shower, physically and spiritually naked before God. "It's the most humble place you can be," he says. And when he doesn't know what to pray, he prays anyway. "I yell and I holler," he says. "I've had entire prayers when I didn't say a word but moaned."

He described the night he was thrashing in bed chanting, "I need peace." "And I got it," he said. "My heart rate slowed down. My breathing became calm. I felt like it was an eternity between breaths. I was barely functioning. I was right there in God's presence."

According to the article, those moments seem to come when he absolutely can't take it anymore. He doesn't know where this peace comes from. He calls it God. Isaiah would, too. "They will walk and not be faint," he wrote. What a miracle!

